

What You Can Do to Help

We need to start now to prepare teens for what can happen to their lives and their futures if they get too involved with gambling. Prevention efforts designed specifically for adolescents are critical. As teachers, you can play an important role in prevention of youth and adult problem gambling.

Perhaps the best way to steer your students clear of problems is to do more of what you're already doing. (Keep on being someone who is easy to talk to.)

You can increase your students' awareness of problem gambling. Incorporate gambling issues into lifestyle, health and other curriculum:

- Brainstorm about the negative effects of gambling. Ask students to tell *you* what it can do to someone's self-esteem, relationships or financial situation.
- Ask students to come up with some good alternatives to gambling — fun activities and talents that can be developed.

And most important of all . . .

If you think someone in your class may have a problem, make sure they talk to someone:

- a teacher they trust
- a parent or a counselor
- a problem gambling crisis counselor

Let your students know there are others who have had this problem and that there are people they can talk to who have been through it. There are people just like them who have decided not to let gambling harm their lives.

Your efforts may help to catch a gambling problem before it goes too far. It may even save a life. When it comes to the rewards you get from teaching, this is one that is pretty hard to beat.

Anyone who is concerned about their own or another person's gambling can talk to a trained problem gambling crisis counselor.

Pick up the phone and call us at our Pennsylvania Statewide Helpline.

**In Pennsylvania:
1-800-848-1880 or 1-800-GAMBLER**



**Council on
Compulsive Gambling
of Pennsylvania**

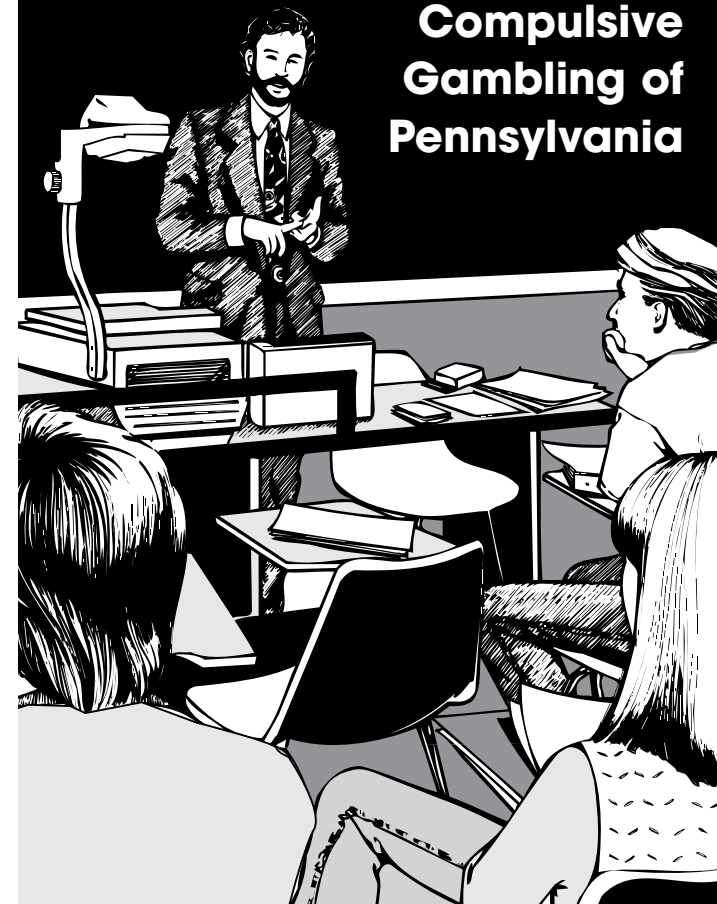
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Talking to Students About

GAMBLING

**The Council on
Compulsive
Gambling of
Pennsylvania**



It Is All Around Us

Today we live in a gambling culture. Most of us gamble at least a little. We often gamble for good causes — to support our favorite charity or sports team. Advertising encourages us to view gambling as a normal form of recreation. An increasing number of gambling opportunities are available, and more people are gambling than ever before. The result is an increase in problem gambling behavior among both adults and youth.

We know that more young people who gamble experience problems at levels several times higher than adults who gamble. Research indicates that most adults who develop serious problems started to gamble before age eighteen. For these reasons, youth are identified as a high risk group targeted for prevention efforts.

Research indicates that gambling at an early age increases the risk of developing gambling problems. Young gamblers are **at greater risk** than adults of becoming problem gamblers.

Young People Are Affected by Gambling

Teens can be affected by excessive gambling in two major ways. Their parents could have a serious gambling problem, or they could be at risk themselves of developing a problem.

Recent studies indicate that students whose parents gamble a lot have almost **twice** the rate of problem gambling as their friends whose parents don't gamble.

What Is Problem Gambling?

For most kids, gambling is just plain fun. If they win — great! If they lose, it is not a major catastrophe. They go on to other, more productive activities. However, for some teens the attraction to gamble is much stronger. They start to gamble more than they meant to and lose more than they can afford. Their inability to control their behavior is a sign of problem gambling.

Additional signs may include frequent gambling activities and increased absence from home or school. Teens who often borrow money, steal money and use school lunch money for gambling may have a gambling problem. Poor school performance, lack of concentration and a don't care attitude may also indicate problems.

Severe gambling problems can destroy opportunities for self-development and academic achievement, create conflict with the law, cause depression, and may even lead to suicide. Recognizing early signs of a teen gambling problem can make a significant difference in a young person's life.

How Many Teens Are Problem Gamblers?

Although studies differ, they all show that problem gambling rates among youth are much higher than the rates for adults. Studies estimate that 1 to 3% of adults are problem gamblers compared to 4 to 8% among youth.

Why Some Kids Develop Problems

Teen gambling problems are known to be affected by:

- parents who gamble
- peers who gamble
- family substance abuse problems
- family preoccupation with material success
- early exposure to gambling
- personal history of alcohol or drug abuse

Video Games Have a Special Appeal for Youth

Many teenagers are pros when it comes to arcade video games. They like the flashing lights, clanging bells and fast excitement. Video Lottery Terminals (VLTs, commonly referred to as "slot machines") have the same appeal. The instant payout, high action and illusion of control reinforce continued playing. Researchers and gambling counselors agree that VLT gambling is the most habit forming type of gambling activity today. Over half of all calls to Problem Gambling Help Lines are related to VLT playing.

A common myth is that skills acquired from arcade video games will transfer to VLT games. Skill has no effect on one's ability to win or lose at most of today's VLT games.

Although VLTs are not currently available in Pennsylvania, providing students with the facts about VLTs can help prevent future problems.